

# The Innis Herald

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## Better Late than Never: Joel "Suck it Ebert" Elliott Counts Down the Best of 2004

### 10 *Mean Creek* (Jacob Aaron Estes)

The first of four directorial debuts on this list, Estes' film about middle school politics and tragedy is surprising because it feels like something rarely done in film these days: a simple, incredibly well-told, and emotionally convincing story, on a subject that so often produces implausible mishaps. Following a group of kids who decide to play a prank on a bully, change their minds, then commit a tragic accident, Estes creates stunning tableaux of adolescence, rarely matched in emotional complexity and ambivalence. How well Rory Culkin, Josh Peck and Carly Schroeder convey the psychological reality of their characters makes the relatively unlikely possibility of the storyline entirely believable. Not to mention that just when *Mean Creek* would have stumbled, and exceeded its possibilities, it concludes in a startling and lucid ending; even more so for not trying to give any specific kind of moral closure.

### 9 *Maria Full of Grace* (Joshua Marston)

Wow, the Oscars must really be turning a new leaf. Did you see that nominee list? Catalina Sandino Moreno for Best Actress in a leading role? I mean, sure she doesn't have a prayer in winning, but here I didn't even think the Academy could find Colombia on a map. Moreno plays a young girl who quits her job in a sweatshop, gets impregnated, and ditches her family and boyfriend to run

as a drug mule to New York City. Swallowing a couple dozen golf ball-sized latex capsules with heroin, Maria is the ultimate symbol of unbridled dignity. This is the only film I've ever seen whose advertisement poster perfectly captures its iconic spirit: a close-up of Maria's face with her chin raised high, ready to swallow the heroin held above her head, and the caption "Based on a thousand true stories". What's even more fascinating, and marks the truly subversive strategy of the film, is the way every devastating choice made by its protagonist is given its full weight, without hesitation or compromise.

### 8 *The Triplets of Belleville* (Sylvain Chomet)

This is so weird, it has to be French Canadian. The only film I've ever in my life managed to 'sell' to my parents, *Triplets* is a remarkably understated, idiosyncratic animation told with the kind of precise sound effects that rivals Sergio Leone. With the complete absence of character dialogue, a bold but stubborn box-shaped woman whips her son into shape so he can run the Tour de France. The rest involves a mafia kidnapping, a freak New York-Paris hybrid city, a series of traumatic train-related nightmares which plague the family dog, and three Vaudeville triplets who use a vacuum cleaner and a newspaper as instruments.

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## Eisner's *Spirit* in a Better Place Peter Steiner remembers a great artist

Will Eisner was possibly the most talented graphic artist America ever had. He was born in Brooklyn on March 6, 1917 and grew up in the slums and tenements of New York City's Bronx. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School, where his love of art was encouraged by his teachers. After publishing some work in the school newspaper, Eisner was able to get his first professional work into a comic book called *WOW! What a Magazine!* in 1936. He created the characters Harry Karry and the Flame for *WOW!*, but the magazine was cancelled after only four issues.

Soon after *WOW!* stopped publishing, Eisner and a friend named Jerry Iger formed the Eisner-Iger Studio, which produced a large number of comic strips in the hopes of getting some of them into newspapers. One of their few successes was a seagoing adventure strip called *Hawks of the Sea*. The studio employed several artists who would eventually become comics legends, including Jack Kirby and Bob Kane. The partnership with Iger ended in 1939 after Eisner joined Quality Comics Group to produce a syndicated 16-page newspaper supplement which would contain three color comic features and would be distributed across the United States. The lead feature that Eisner created for the *Comic Book Section* was an adventure serial called *The Spirit*.

Eisner's feature was unbelievably popular, and the whole supplement was soon renamed *The Spirit Section*. The *Spirit* was a Central City detective and reporter named

Denny Colt who occasionally put on a suit and a domino mask to go out and beat up (and get beat up by) criminals. Eisner's work was groundbreaking; his stories were highly cinematic, and he used techniques (like artistic "splash pages", dramatic "camera" angles, atmospheric lighting, and creative storytelling) that were not used in most other comics.

When Eisner was drafted during World War II, he ended up making posters, comic strips, and other illustrations for the military. When he got back to civilian life, *The Spirit* had fallen on hard times at the hands of less capable cartoonists, so Eisner reintroduced the character and retold his origin in 1945 and, with the help of artists like Jules Feiffer and Wally Wood, soon returned the strip to its former prominence.

Eisner continued work on *The Spirit* 'til 1952, and he continued to innovate on the strip, sometimes creating simple stories focusing on normal, non-crimefighting folks and sometimes diving into freewheeling fantasy and science fiction.

Eisner also founded the American Visuals Corporation, a commercial art company that produced illustrations for educational and commercial organizations. AVC produced material for the Army, the Baltimore Colts, RCA Records, New York Telephone and others, and the company was successful enough that Eisner eventually chose to devote most of his time to his company, rather than to comics.

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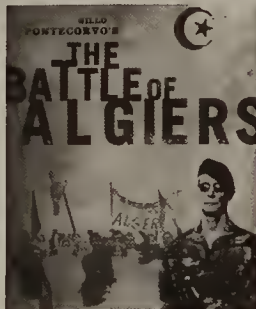
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## Innis Herald. Community

### The Logic of Political Art and the Dissent of Artful Politics Stephanie Silverman reaffirms the importance of the link between art and politics



If everything is political, and art is everywhere, then is art necessarily political or is politics necessarily artful? Further, whose responsibility is it to coax the smooth coordination between these two fields: the artist or the politician?

We here at the Herald are in no position to tackle the big and loaded questions alluded to above. Personally, I have very little philosophical training, a little too much self-awareness, and even less time due to the unreasonable expectations of UoT professors *vis a vis* workload expectations. I do, however, have control over a modest budget and have been doing my best to siphon its funds into means of exploring these ideas in the public discourse. The staff of the Herald has committed

### CINSSU Update

#### Andy Greenhow gives you the skinny on the CINny

Hiya Kids. It's a new semester and Cinema Studies Student Union, henceforth simply CINSSU, has lots of new stuff if you just so happen to be a fan of free movies. So, if it's all the same to you, here's a quick word on what CINSSU's doing. CINSSU opened the new Free Friday Film season on January 7<sup>th</sup> with *Napoleon Dynamite* and, as hard as it is to believe, it's only going to get better. Since then, we've done a "Winter in Canada" series and coming up is a queer film series, a triple-bill cult night, and much more. Check out our website, [www.utoronto.ca/fff](http://www.utoronto.ca/fff), to see about Free Friday Films as well as free sneak previews and film festivals. Also, at the end of last semester and at the *Napoleon Dynamite* screening this semester, pop was sold with \$80 going to Daily Bread Food Bank and \$145 to Doctors Without Borders to help provide post-tsunami relief; a big thank you is in order to all of you who bought pop at the Free Friday Film to help these worthwhile causes.

And with that, I'm off to get back to browsing for hotties on the Facebook. See you at the Free Friday Film.

### Greetings from your friends at ENSU:

Hope everyone had a great break! ENSU ideas are moving right along this month! We're planning on holding our movie night sometime in the second week of February as a movie night/mixer, to keep you guys right up-to-date with our events! For the movie it was suggested that we show *The Take*; however, we have not decided yet, so if anyone has any other suggestions we are happy to hear them (email [kbaxter119@hotmail.com](mailto:kbaxter119@hotmail.com)).

As for our fashion show, we've decided to have it on March 11<sup>th</sup> from 3 to 6pm in the Hart House Music Room. In the past, U of T has not been known for promoting environmentally innovative ideas, so we're trying to use this fashion show to attract some attention and make a difference within the university community as well as the city of Toronto.

That being said, we are now advertising for fashion designers (and eventually models) so if you know anyone who is interested (or are interested yourself) in designing trendy, eco-friendly clothes, please email ENSU at [utorensu@yahoo.ca](mailto:utorensu@yahoo.ca) or me (at the above address) and I will direct you to the appropriate contact person. It will be lots of fun and you'll get some good exposure, so sign up now and let's get started! That's all for now!

Keri Baxter  
ENSU



## The Journey of a Lifetime

Vaquas Shaikh writes on Muslims from around the world who gathered in Makkah, Saudi Arabia last month to perform Hajj

"And pilgrimage to the sacred house is incumbent on whoever has the means..." (The Holy Quran). Nearly two million Muslims from around the world gathered in the small city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia last month to fulfill the fifth pillar of their faith: Hajj. This physical, mental and spiritual trial, lasting about five days, was performed in the exact method demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammed 1400 years ago.

For Muslims, Hajj is an opportunity to embrace their faith, to beseech absolution and to strengthen their ties with God. Hence, each year, pilgrims of various nationalities, ages and capital convene on equal ground at the focal point of the Islamic world. Covered only

with two seamless sheets of cloth, they represent the timeless reality in Islam that all men and women are equal in the eyes of God and their worldly assets mean nothing. The most memorable event to those that performed Hajj was the Tawaf – seven circles around God's house, the Ka'bah. "Lifted by the poetry of the prayers they recited in unison, a vast sea of people orbited the Holy Ka'bah," is how it was described by Thomas Abercrombie who witnessed the Tawaf when he performed Hajj. Despite the exhaustion, sleep deprivation and heat stress, people rejoiced on Thursday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of January after completing the rites of Hajj and celebrated Eid-ul-Adha with Muslims around the world.



## Just Thought You Might Like To Know Matthew Lau puts it in perspective

### Death Tolls:



Tsunami: 225,000

\*\*\*\*\*

Second Congo Nine-Nation Civil War  
(1998 – Present): 3,800,000

Sudan Darfur Conflict (2003 – Present):  
200,000

Algeria Civil War (1992 – Present):  
150,000

### Hunger and Poverty:

-Annually: 10,000,000

-Daily: 27,400

-Every 9 days: 250,000

### Children Under 5 years, from Starvation and Malnutrition:

-Annually: 6,000,000

-Daily: 16,500

-Every two weeks: 231,000

Just thought you might like to know.

Sources: World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, International Rescue Committee (IRC), U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), World Hunger Education Service (WHEs), Human Development Report (HDR), *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Agence France Presse*, *Chicago Tribune*, *BBC News*



## The Logic of Political Art and the Dissent of Artful Politics

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this publication to a mandate of arts and politics, and has hopefully carved out a niche for it within the university campus. It would be fruitless for us to think that we could have even tried to qualitatively cover the immediate "news" since our time lag is two weeks and by then the "news" has usually "changed"; besides, there are plenty of other outlets available discarded on a bench near you to fill that need. Instead, our lil monthly has turned to a more activist stance towards its twin concerns. With a budget smaller than your tuition and half the size of most other UofT-affiliated newspapers, the Herald has sponsored Israeli dissidents and Arab discussion groups, poverty debates, dance nights, and, most recently, a public screening of *The Battle of Algiers*.

Why have we thrown ourselves into this debate? Why did we feel empowered to contribute yet another voice to the already over-capacitated chorus of public opinion? Simply because we want to be a part of that current that shapes our views on everything political, everything artful. I, and most of my staff, see a substantial connection between an artful product – like, say, a newspaper – and a means of communicating serious thought and research – like, say, a newspaper, again! See the connection? The point is that the Herald is just one means of blending the two fields in productive ways that could enrich everyone's learning experiences. There are tons of free lectures on campus on most topics under (and over) the sun, as well as journals to contribute to and other publications to help out with (ahem, ahem). The point is that not only is there a link between art and politics but it is our duty as budding scholars, writers, critics, and photographers to chronicle this connection, and to see to it that every nook and cranny is explored with a sympathetic eye to both the art of politics and the poli-

# No Heart in Hart House

## Nicole Polivka mourns the loss (or non-existence) of comfort at U of T

As life gets more expensive, so does U of T. Over the years, tuition has gone up, things that were once free for varsity athletes (such as physiotherapy and lockers at the AC) now cost money, but we can always console ourselves with the fact that the best things in life are free, and it's the little things that count anyway.

But over the years, the little things have started to disappear as well.

As a graduating student I've been fortunate enough to see all the little things that make U of T feel a little less like school vanish. You young'uns may not remember, but The Playhouse used to have tea and free, freshly baked cookies every day at 3 o'clock, and you could eat and drink sitting on nice, comfortable chairs and inviting couches. The cookies and comfort have been eliminated in order to make room for a cafeteria with uninviting (but durable and hygienic) hard plastic chairs. Before they started building the new residence, there was also a beautiful garden outside of the Playhouse, which was torn up due to the construction.

Now I know that the argument is that, well, what is more practical, a rose garden or a new residence? Unfortunately, a lot of things can be eliminated under the guise of practicality. And while previously the loss of such things was certainly irritating, but not worth commenting on in our illustrious college paper, U of T has eliminated what I felt was the last bastion of comfort.

If you have ever been to the Hart House Library on years previous to this one, you would know what I am talking about. It was one of the most relaxing places on campus, a quiet place you could go to take a nap and not be bothered. Perhaps sleeping in a library sounds strange, but that is what everyone did there, and as students, we are certainly not strangers to sleeping in odd places. How often do you take naps while studying, or between classes? How often do you see people with their heads down on the desks at Robarts, trying to refresh their brains before they return to studying? But unfortunately we live in an anti-nap society that thinks people can (should, if we are to be productive capitalist labourers) work for 16 hours a day without regenerating. There aren't that many nap-friendly places, and now, even Hart House is no longer one of them.

This comes as a great shock and disappointment to many of the regulars who went there. People are not only disappointed but also angry, which isn't surprising if you had ever been there. It was easily one of the most relaxing and welcoming places on campus, and considering how few of those there were to begin with, it comes as a great loss.

When I asked why such a change was made, I was told that patrons sleeping was distracting to those who wanted to study. But as someone who visited (and slept) regularly in this library for 3 years, I can tell you that, while snoring occasionally became disruptive, ultimately people were always respectful of the rules and of other patrons. They were just respectful of what they knew was one of the very few of this campus' truly wonderful and relaxing places. There are lots of places on this campus you can go if you want to study; there are very few you can go to if you want to simply relax.

"It's a library, not a hotel," said the per-

son at Hart House to whom I spoke. Read: this is a place of study, not comfort, which is ironic, considering that Hart House likes to consider itself a place for students that has a more home-like atmosphere. As a matter of fact, Hart House used to even advertise that it was a place to relax and take a nap, if you ever went on a tour there.

By eliminating these little things of comfort, Hart House, and on a larger scale, U of T is making itself, well, uncomfortable. The Hart House library was the one place left on campus that truly felt like home away from home. The Playhouse used to be that way. I'm sure there were once other places that felt that way as well that have been eliminated to make room for more practical uses. However, by eliminating these places, U of T is

not making us better students, it is alienating us. People's fond memories of university do not come from the hours they spent studying, but from their comfort and leisure activities. If U of T wishes to keep up its world-renowned reputation, why would they want their graduating students to remember, and more importantly, to tell other people, that they remember the university as cold and uninviting? This is not to mention that, generally, happier people make better students.

What I find especially unfortunate is that the university continues its trend of eliminating the small and pleasant things contrary to the very best efforts of other groups on campus. People such as those at the Innis Registrar's office and the Department of Physical Education, if you've ever dealt with either, try so hard to make this large and impersonal campus more accessible to students. It's too bad that, unlike these groups, not everyone at this university understands how much of a difference the little things make.

Life is not merely about practicality, as pleasure is inherently illogical. But of course, there are practical reasons for eliminating these frivolous comforts: solid, logical, practical reasons. There are many other 'useless extras' we can eliminate:

### 1. Heating

The huge stone buildings, due to the terrible insulat-

ing properties of stone, cost a fortune to keep heated. What is the point of keeping something heated for 24 hours a day for a measly 8 hours of class time? Students can wear coats.

### 2. Sports

Everyone knows that real nerds, the ones we want at U of T, don't play sports. Forget that the percentage of athletes who get As is higher than the percentage of people who get As in the general U of T population. Funds that go to traveling, physiotherapists, coaches' salaries, and other expenses (thank God we're not building a stadium, one that would have included student activity areas and a day care) can be diverted to buy more books. If you want to play soccer, go to Yale.

### 3. Grounds keeping

Do you have any idea how much people are paid per hour to keep up the grounds at U of T? It's ridiculous, especially considering that things only grow here for 3, maybe 4 months of the year. Hmm, but on second thought, if prospective students come to visit the university in the summer and it's really ugly, then they might not want to come here. We really only want to alienate the people who are already giving us money, so let's forget this.

### 4. Sunshine

If we could find a way to block out the sun, we could stop ourselves from having to air condition the aforementioned stone buildings. Oh, wait, we don't have air conditioning in most of those buildings anyway. Never mind.

### 5. Social Events

Drinking kills valuable brain cells.

### 6. Laughter

This is a place of learning, not a comedy club. From now on, each professor will be fined \$500 per joke made, and an extra \$50 for 5 seconds the students continue to laugh.

### 7. Friendship

From now on, it will be known as 'networking,' and will be done for business purposes only.

### 8. Sexual Activity

From now on, sexual activity will be highly regulated. It will only be allowed if it is between two U of T students and done for the explicit purpose of procreation, so as to create hyper-intelligent super babies.

### 9. Happiness

If we could just stop students from wasting their time doing things that make them happy, just imagine how productive they would be, as they can spend all that time

studying! Look at Data, on Star Trek. He has no feelings, and he could easily do the work of 100 students!

So where can you turn to if you're looking for a comfortable atmosphere in this university? If you're lucky enough, you can get to deal with the Innis Registrar or the Department of Physical Education, and perhaps some other campus groups with whom I have not personally had the pleasure of dealing. But if not, well, you can wait until you've graduated and got a job and can finally buy a place you can call home, because your money can't buy a home here at U of T.



Perhaps Robarts says it all



150 years of great robots



## Not Everyone Can Play Guitar

### Erin Rodgers asserts a fundamental truth of life

Oh the guitar, an instrument that has fueled as many adolescent male fantasies as Pamela Anderson and Angelina Jolie combined (no I don't mean combined in THAT way, though perhaps that is the ultimate adolescent male fantasy).

While it's not a very original dream, it is a very understandable one. Who wouldn't want to be a great guitar player when so many rock stars seem to quickly ascend to the status of rock gods? Of course, very few musicians actually do make it to the highest ranks of fame, and if so are usually only in the spotlight for a brief shining moment between stints in bad bar bands. Even those who do manage to maintain their popularity (Mick Jagger) become creepy, caterwauling dinosaurs completely dried up of all originality and talent (Mick Jagger).

Despite these facts, there is still no end to guitarists that are constantly desperate for people's attention, a problem that only seems to get worse as I grow older. I now find that before attending any house parties I must carefully put on my face, and I'm not talking about makeup. Instead I practice the blank middle-of-the-road expression that I wedge onto my visage every time I hear someone say the inevitable, "Hey, I brought my guitar." Without careful preparation, I know that a look of abject horror will appear before I can stop it.

Now I realize that some people love this kind of thing. "But Erin!" they say "it's so much fun to have a sing-a-long at a

party. It brings people together and gets them talking."

In fact, even I have been amazed by the guitar's power to unite. I became very close to several of my friends due to some inspired strumming by a young man on a camping trip. We found ourselves united into a solid front against his particularly bad Coldplay cover-band-esque crooning. It was music so bad and unending that one of us, a man who usually displays the kind of quiet restraint one generally associates with saints, threatened to inflict bodily harm on the singer with his own guitar in a way that I can only assume is anatomically impossible. This incident has become so legendary that I find that no social gathering of these friends is complete without one of us warbling part of the guitarists

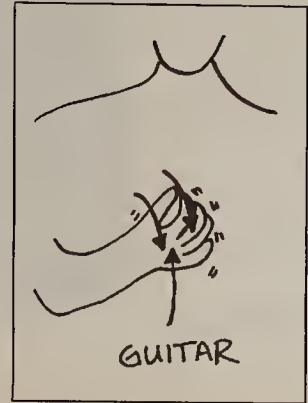


double entendre-laden "music."

I hope that the story above will act as a parable for all of you would-be rock stars. Perhaps one day casual guitar use will go the same way as social smoking. After all, I have no problem with bad musicians all hovering together outside in the cold passing a guitar around to wow each other with their barely recognizable attempt at a Radiohead song. The rest of us will sit inside, free from the second-hand ear damage I am sure is a direct result of being forced into constantly listening to this crap. I say we call the politicians. After all what is more important

than the public's health? I, for one, feel that a small group that puts its own desires before that of the public at large is threatening my mental health. If we can force others who continue to take part in things that the majority of the public finds unpleasant to go outside, then let these would be entertainers take it outside too.

On second thought, I take that back. After all, haven't smokers suffered enough?



## The Three Stages of Essay Anxiety

### Associate Editor Stephen Hutchison examines life on the edge of procrastination

It is 6:00 pm. You are enjoying dinner, perhaps in a sushi bar, and perhaps with the company of a good friend. Your mind, however, can focus neither on the delicious food nor on your delightful company. Within 18 hours you will need to have completed a 3000-word paper, of which you have thus far written zero words. Only a long night of fatigue and agony, your own ingenuity, and a bottle of vodka stand between you and academic failure. You take a sip of your drink, whatever it may be, and ponder the evening ahead.

If this scenario sounds familiar, then you and I very likely have more than a few things in common. In certain cases, months of research will ultimately be reduced to a single, excruciatingly long night of make-or-break essay writing. During these frenzied and intense 18-hour writing sessions, you will likely experience a range of emotional reactions to your predicament. For both your reading pleasure and for future reference, I have attempted to catalogue the three emotional stages of writing last-minute essays.

Stage 1: Panic. "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!"

Panic is the emotion by which you have most likely been stricken throughout the day, while completing the various tasks that need to be done before the essay writing may begin. You consider the task before you and are completely overwhelmed and demoralized by its apparent magnitude. You need to write 12 pages, sort through at least as many sources, and ensure writing quality, but you haven't even formulated an argument yet... additionally, you're already completely exhausted from writing two essays just the other day. You tell yourself that your task is impossible, that you are doomed, and, moreover, that even *should* you complete your task, your grade will likely be awful. You stagger home in a listless and confused daze, unwilling to allow yourself to even contemplate the full implications of your situation.

Stage 2: Defiance. "This ain't nothin', bitch!"

As you arrive home and begin to prepare to write your essay, you find that your mood suddenly shifts. You realize even more acutely how challenging your task is and, rather than shrinking in terror, you actually begin to revel in your own desperation. You've been in far worse situations before and had been able to



emerge unscathed and with good marks. Does this essay really think that it can beat you? Ha! You can do it; all you need is a little inspiration. At this point those who consider themselves to be either *idiot-savants* or the reincarnation of Ernest Hemingway may wish to experiment with alcohol, and possibly drugs, in order to construct a truly unique argument (and dull the inevitable physical pain of not sleeping).

You begin writing your essay and soon you come into your own. You progress quickly, surging ahead in the word count. You convince yourself that your argument is brilliant. You re-

flect upon the quality of your research and find it to be excellent. At this pace, your surmise, you may even be completed by the early morning and have time for a decent amount of sleep. Thoughts of sugarplums and your own greatness dance in your head.

Stage 3: Acceptance. "Ehh..."

By now it is 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning, and the high that was induced by your own sense of self-satisfaction – and possibly other substances – has now dissipated. You review your essay and are utterly baffled. Does your argument make sense? Do you even have an argument? You don't know and by this point, quite frankly, you don't care. What you do know is that your dreams of actually getting any sleep tonight have – like the electoral aspirations of so many Democratic hopefuls – been brutally dashed. It no longer seems to matter whether the assignment is completed or what mark you receive but, as you've already invested about a dozen hours into the paper, you decide that you might as well cross the finish line.

Your brain has lost the ability to analyze or think critically or even cogently. You recall what your original plan was in writing the essay and simply follow it without bothering to question yourself. The task at hand is merely completion; quality has become irrelevant. As you stumble into the concluding paragraph, you reach deeply into the bottom of your brain's intellectual barrel and emerge with the few tired clichés that you haven't yet abused. You quote T.S. Eliot, or possibly John Keats. You make reference to the dawn of time. You claim that your essay has illustrated some overarching lesson, knowing full well that nothing could be further from the truth. Finally, you recapitulate your introduction almost word for word and then pretend as though it's something entirely novel. You crawl across the finish, but at least you made it and that's what counts.



## I can see tomorrow in your dance!

### Michele Costa joins the Dance Dance Revolution

Sometimes life skills come in handy when you aren't even expecting them. Tricks and talents you have picked up along the way, which sharpen your mind and enhance your ability, become second nature - saving the day, or pumping up the jam beyond your wildest expectations! This is the story of DDR.

So, when I first started driving and was having a little trouble remembering to pay attention to not *moist*, but *all* of the signs, lights and pedestrians, people told me that paying attention to signs would soon become natural, as all responsible drivers instinctually switch their gaze between mirrors and always know when their lane is ending. Well, as my passengers and one frightened middle-aged Eastern European couple can attest to, this never became natural for me, often with mildly destructive, but usually charming and amusing repercussions.

So I don't drive; I walk or take transit. It's safer, cheaper, and you're less likely to die or kill others. Of course, in the winter time, this lifestyle adds a whole slew of troubling consequences to one's day. This includes such things as enduring the cold, buying extra toques and mastering a graceful, ladylike swagger on icy sidewalks. This attractive strut typically becomes more of a wild free-style skate/slide involving clenched muscles and uncontrollable jazz hands on pre-salted city streets. Luckily for me, it seems no one has mastered the art of walking on ice. Unlike sign-noticing and pedestrian life-saving it doesn't seem to be something that becomes second-nature after simply practicing it for a while. The clumsy panicked shuffle seems to continue day to day without any noticeable improvement. Until, that is, one discovers the artful magic that is DDR.

What is DDR you ask? Shame on you for your uneducated ways, for DDR is the hope and future for an entire generation! DDR, (or Dance Dance Revolution to the layperson), is a video game, technically, played with one's dance-moves and mojo, but it is so much more. Now if you, like me, grew up in any of the GTA's many suburbs you probably encountered DDR at Playdium, in a bowling alley, or at any other large arcade. You may have seen it over the shoulders of a large



crowd of attentive coca cola-filled teenagers, likely with bright eyes all focused on one person, who was dominating the area. Each arcade had a DDR master, usually a middle-aged, immensely talented Asian dude who would spend Saturdays in a realm of glory, showing off for pre-pubescent and awe-struck youngsters. Likely you, like me, most people avoided humiliation by pretending to be disinterested in DDR, preferring instead to play never-ending games of Bust a Move, which was conveniently located at a 45 degree angle to the DDR booth. Well my friend, DDR recently re-entered my life in a much more positive way, and I hope that you too can open your arms and calf muscles to the joy it can bring. Not only is DDR more fun than any Pilates class or solitary bedroom dance-a-thon is going to be, but it can also be a Canadian pedestrian's saviour and best friend between the months of December and February. Confused? Let me explain.

DDR requires a player to hit arrows with their feet on a game pad which sits on the floor. To a variety of upbeat bizarre Asian pop songs, one attempts to quickly move one's feet along with the game's guide arrows, to the encouragement or stinging ridicule of the game's electronic host. The key to success in DDR is agility, quick-thinking, and ability to make smooth, accurate and lightning-fast directional changes with little to no notice.

This is all shockingly familiar to anyone who has had to walk down any major street during a snow storm. Suddenly the brightly-coloured screen arrows of DDR become mentally translated into a patch of ice on the ground, or a large truck making its way to the slush puddle next to you. Nimble and skilled, you can now jump past danger, light-footed and full of grace. I have noticed a revolutionary improvement in myself already. I can now forgo treasured and practical winter boots in favour of much more fashionable but seemingly dangerous pointed flats whenever I so choose. I feel secure that as my slick soles come in contact with slippery cement the spirit of DDR will keep me upright and absent of bruising. The second-nature instinct and logic that was supposed to keep my car from crashing has come to me in a much more helpful and environmentally-friendly way, and let me tell you, it makes me feel like dancing!

I am confident that with a little more practice I will be able to run full speed down an icy sidewalk with no falling or sliding whatsoever. In fact, I fully expect that passersby will shout "awesome...awesome!", "surprising moves!" or "what technique! You've got the rhythm!" essentially proclaiming me the Winter Lord(ess) of the Dance, Dance Revolution!



## "He's Just Not That Into You"

### Chandler Levack De-bunks Sex and the City Lore

Future's Bakery, Thursday evening, 10:15 PM. Over two cappuccinos and Oreo cheesecake, my friend Angela\* and I are dissecting Angela's latest crush on Rufus\*, the anti-social philosophy major. "I asked him for coffee, but then he said he had to leave," she explains, punctuating her words with a biodegradable stir stick. "What do you think that means?" Being the kind and gentle friend that I am, I take Angela by the hand, take a sip of foam, and say: "It sounds like he's just not that into you."

Greg Berhendt and Liz Tuccillo's book is sparking a dating revolution from Manhattan to Mississauga. Recently placed eight on Amazon's best-seller list, *He's Just Not That Into You: The No-Excuses Truth to Understanding Guys* is a no holds barred bible on every excuse you've made about that dishy Starbucks' barista...and more. The philosophy begins where all great things lie, in a past episode of "Sex and the City" - where a pre-post-it Berger explains to Miranda that the guy who wouldn't come upstairs to her apartment, "just wasn't that into her". While initially shocked, Miranda takes this advice to heart, freeing herself to only invest emotionally in guys that seem to respond to her considerable charms. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but ultimately one that's best for your heart.

Still the book hurts like hell to read. The writers are absolutely merciless when it comes to the dating situations and excuses that pop up relationship after relationship with the same staying power as the UGG boot. Each chapter begins with a truism - "he's just not that into you if he's not asking you out", "he's just not into you if he's not calling you" (what, you mean cell-phones don't spontaneously burst into flames?), "he's just not into you if he's dating someone else", and the

real clincher for me, "he's just not into you if he's breaking up with you!". Excusez-moi! After a whole summer of missed calls, "band practices", and personal trainer's appointments, I was glad to release myself from the ex-boyfriend who drove a Vespa, liked the Smiths, but also had a receding hairline and donned a purse. I think he's in Montreal studying German literature, and finding himself by smoking American cigarettes and styling his hair (well, what's left of it) in new and exciting ways. Way to go Jack! You rock!

Yet after 165 pages of explaining blown-off dinners and rescheduled movie plans, both writers insist that we are hot, smart, and cool enough to warrant true dedication (apparently, everyone is). By moving on from the ex-boyfriend who wasn't worth your time anyways, by taking up tai bo, photography, organic composting - anything to stop thinking about him - eventually you can realize that you are worth it, even without buying L'Oréal. The key message of the book "all crappy relationships do is make you feel crappy" does make sense, even to the seriously deluded. So in the spirit of the upcoming holiday of (semi) hell, Valentine's Day, let's hope that everyone can find - if not that special someone, us again. In the upcoming onslaught of Cupids, sequined hearts, and couples walking hand in hand into jewelry stores - sometimes being alone is enough to be completely satisfied.

If anything, I think I've learned that there is someone out there who won't forget my birthday on (ahem), Remembrance Day. Terrific.

\*Names have been changed to protect the innocent and not so innocent



## Who Wants to Play?

### Stephanie Silverman's game is all strategy, no ethics

If we had our way, a new board-game called *Eternal Debt: Who Can Beat the IMF?* would definitely be required for all formative minds who sit down for a family-friendly game of *Monopoly*. Indeed, the rules and results of playing this game are both tragic and hilarious at the same time; could you imagine the Kafka-esque results of smalltown Canada sitting down to simulate the plight of an industrializing Latin American country? It would be amazing, sad, and definitely a snapshot of the peculiar moment of globalized time in which we are currently floating. This game is not a joke; it is being manufactured by an Argentina-based company called Ruibal and will hopefully be available for purchase at every Toys 'R Us by next Christmas! Well, we can dream, can't we? Here are the Rules, translated from the Spanish by Marc Rosenthal:

#### Object of the game

Take advantage of the raw materials that Latin America produces, industrialize them, and introduce the finished products to the big markets of the North. The capital is administered by the IMF with everything that implies: conditions, devaluation, etc. The object of the game is to overcome those obstacles and to beat the IMF.

#### The board

The board is divided into North and South. In the North are the more developed countries, a dozen industries, and the IMF. In the South is LATIN AMERICA, with raw materials—such as iron, copper, grain, livestock, etc.—that are exported without added value. Each player chooses a piece to advance across the board and places it in the square Latin America. The players can build up to three national industries in each territory of the South and another three multinationals in the North. At the start of the game, the IMF has all the money and all the property.

#### Gold reserves

Each player begins with three gold pieces. Gold reserves cannot be used to pay for:

- debt principal (only the interest can be paid)
- monopoly creation
- capital flight
- military coups

#### Monopoly

A monopoly is based on one player's ability to purchase another player's property, even when that player does not wish to sell. The IMF authorizes the sale and profits from the monopoly by taxing it. Let's imagine that "Pedro" has wheat with two national industries and one multinational. When "Maria" lands on wheat she should pay "Pedro" \$700, but "Maria" decides to monopolize the wheat. She should pay the IMF the "monopoly tax" of \$2,000, and afterward she should buy the territory, which will include all of the investment made by "Pedro." In total, "Maria" pays \$2,000 to the IMF and \$2,550 to "Pedro" and becomes the owner of wheat. Monopolies can be created only in the South. (In the North monopolies just develop over the long term.)

#### Debt

In order to make all of the necessary purchases, players can ask for as many loans as they like from the IMF. Interest rates are set at 10 percent. Every time a player lands on or passes over the IMF square, he pays the interest to the IMF. When a player accumulates a debt of \$10,000, he is able to renegotiate his debt with the IMF. The player pays interest on the remaining debt, and the IMF devalues his currency. The player's currency then has less value, and he advances more rapidly and is forced to pay more often. The maximum debt a player can accumulate is \$30,000. When a player accumulates that much debt, he will receive no more loans, and an economic embargo begins.

#### Economic embargo

In order to get the money that he needs, the embargoed player gives the IMF his property. The IMF auctions this property to the other players at a base price of 50 percent of the initial investment. If there are no offers, the IMF will keep the property and pay the embargoed player 50 percent of the investment. With the money recovered from the auction, the embargoed player can pay his debt and continue playing normally. If the money recovered is not enough, he can turn in additional property to the IMF, and the process can be repeated. Capital flight: The player that lands on this square rolls a die, and each point rolled equals \$1,000 that he must pay the IMF. Military coup: Landing on this square means that a player has to turn in all of his cash. October 12, 1492: Discovery of America; the player turns in a gold piece.

#### The end of the game

If one player or a team of players gains control of half of LATIN AMERICA, having built at least two national industries on each territory in the South and two multinational industries in the North, they have obtained power equal to that of the IMF. That player or team will retire with all of the glory, not counting impending debt. If a player or a team is able to industrialize twelve territories of the South and create at least one multinational industry in each country of the North, they will be able to establish entrepreneurial conditions. The IMF will not be able to pressure them any longer, and they would merit applause from all of the players. It is also possible that players, alone or united, suffer financial collapse during the course of the game, and that the IMF embargoes all of their property and everybody loses. In this case, placards with anti-IMF slogans will be raised and a new game will begin.

## Eisner's *Spirit* in a Better Place

...Continued from cover

Interest in *The Spirit* was rekindled in the 1960s, and some of the strips were reprinted. Eisner created some new material for the reprints, but didn't feel much enthusiasm for them—he believed that, as an artist and creator, he had moved beyond *The Spirit* and wanted to create some comics that he felt were more mature. As a result, he ended up creating a book called *A Contract with God* in 1978.

The four short stories were moral tales set in New York in the 1930s, and the book is considered by most critics to be the first graphic novel. Eisner followed up with a series of graphic novels including *The Dreamer*, *The Building*, *Life on Another Planet*, *Invisible People*, *A Family Matter*, and *To the Heart of the Storm*.

Eisner also taught classes in art and cartooning at the School of Visual Arts in New York and wrote two of the best books around on comic art—*Comics and Sequential Art* and *Graphic Storytelling*. One of the most prominent awards for comic books—the Eisner Award—is named after him in recognition of his influence on the genre. For decades, Eisner himself was the man who stood on the stage and presented each winner

with their award. When J. Michael Straczynski received a 2002 Eisner Award, he said, "You know, you get the Emmy, you don't get it from Emmy. You win the Oscar, you don't get it from Oscar. How freakin' cool is this?"

Eisner died on January 3, 2005, due to complications

from quadruple bypass heart surgery. His last graphic novel—*The Plot*, focuses on debunking the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The Protocols are one of the most damaging pieces of propaganda this past century had to offer, a document that anti-Semites often use to back up their position. It outlines, in detail, how a secret conclave of Jews, the Elders of Zion, will take over the world. It's a work of fiction, written by the Russian Secret Police in the late 19th century, to discredit the Czar's enemies who worked closely with Jews. Since then, it has been translated into many languages. Although the Times of London revealed in 1921 that *The Protocols* was a hoax, millions continue to believe its fictitious plot is true. *The Plot* delves into the nefarious history of the Protocols document, and follows it from Russia to the American south. By re-telling this story, Eisner hoped he could raise public

consciousness of anti-Semitism and draw attention to the devious ways in which governments can use propaganda to influence public opinion. *The Plot* will be released later in 2005.



## Jimmy Eat World's latest album, *Futures* Michael Decicco says it's nothing new

After hearing the single entitled "Pain" on the radio a few times, I heard nothing more from Jimmy Eat World's fifth album. This was when I decided it might be worthwhile to pick up the album, hoping they had strayed away from their "made-for-radio" guitar lines and vocals. I was dead wrong.

The album progression and structure is identical to the 2001 release *Bleed American*, which saw three of its songs receive abundant radio air time. "Pain" has the same rocky feel that the title track "Bleed American" had. I had hoped they would build on this sound and create an entire album with as much power as the single. The only song that comes close to matching its strength is "Nothing wrong," with heavy guitar riffs and strident drums,

straying away from Jim Adkins' normally potent vocals. Any track that was made for *Bleed American* could have easily been released on *Futures* without anyone knowing the difference. It's obvious the band does not want to explore new ideas and develop a unique sound. *Futures* is nothing more than a step into the past, an attempt to repeat the sound and success of *Bleed American*. At the risk of turning into another *Saves the Day* or *New Found Glory*, Jimmy Eat World should build on their sound from their previous albums rather than just reproduce it.

As this album sits collecting dust on my shelf, I can only hope that their next release brings something original.



## answering machine by Kaitlin Bardswich

i hear your voice  
and i know he's gone.  
your tone —  
all computerized  
but still human.  
too human.  
voice cracking  
holding back sobs while i want to hold  
you —  
through that machine.  
as though you were really in there,  
and not at some hospital  
a hundred or so miles away  
with your husband's body  
oh-so-still.  
for as i listen,  
you cry.  
“please —  
just leave me  
just let me weep  
i need to feel it.”  
and as you wipe fresh tears  
away,  
my face is dry.  
i want to cry with you,  
but i don't know how.



## Hail brothers, poets By Joshua Pineda

We waste away  
Thirsting for that  
Sweet opiate, hidden  
Deep, in the recesses of language  
Is it magic?? wonder?? contempt??

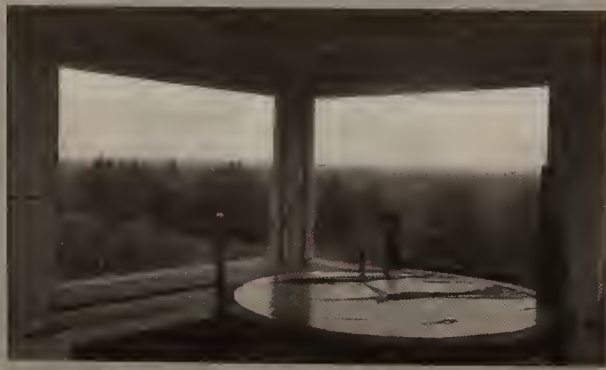
Traces of words consumed  
During wasted nights, we  
Hollow men,  
We eaters of lotus

We waste waste away  
Our thoughts distilled,  
Grown rich, profound, corrupt,  
Like myrrh or musk  
Or visions of scraps descending,  
Dark-haired with flashing eyes,  
Bearing with them honeydew  
And the milk of paradise



## In Memoriam Joshua Pineda

Can I breathe you again, little sister,  
Breathe the Vesuvian effluvia  
Of memories charred & adrift  
Thoughts evanescent, ascending  
Carried away, like novenas  
Uttered without faith?





## Best Films of 2004

...Continued from Cover

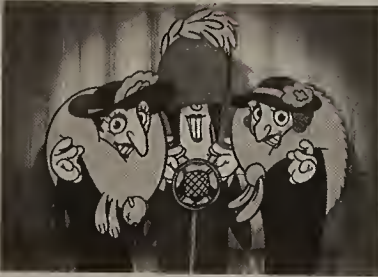
A film that benefits immensely from multiple viewings, it's chalked full of tiny details that would entertain you even if you watched it frame-by-frame. This is Sylvain Chomet's first full-length, and this kind of forward-thinking, innovative compositional masterpiece makes you wildly anticipate what he's going to do next.

### 7 *The Return* (Andrey Zvyagintsev)

*The Return* is a bitter tragedy, a parable with no answer – but definitely not a 'thriller', as it's been branded. The fact that this film would even get branded with such a superficial, historically-ignorant generic title is proof that more than ever we need artists like Zvyagintsev. A father returns to his two sons after being mysteriously absent for most of their lives, and decides the three should go on a camping trip – a seemingly pointless excursion, in which the father doesn't seem to be able to allow them to stay in one place for very long. After a while, the two boys decide they don't exactly trust his quiet but authoritative persona, particularly because he refuses to give certain details like where the hell he's been for 12 years. Defiantly enigmatic, *The Return* eschews conventional notions of closure, in a way that even most art films don't come close to. It's also highly derivative: the director uses the colour blue almost exclusively, in the manner of Tarkovsky; the characters could have dropped out of a Bergman film; there's the quiet, minimalist horror of Polanski (think *Knife in the Water*, especially); and the subtle comparisons between the father and Christ are enhanced by shots taken directly from Renaissance paintings. Still, the combination creates a mesmerizing effect; the startling, inconclusive ending will linger in your mind more than any other film you will watch this year.

### 6 *Dogville* (Lars Von Trier)

Ah, film critics, those hypocritical little cynics (myself included, sadly). *Dogville* has appeared on so many top 10 lists of 2004 that it's easy to forget that when it was first released less than a year ago, most critics hated it so much they decided to bitterly give away the ending to any unfortunate readers, in a lame, moral crusade against obviously 'hateful' filmmakers like Lars Von Trier. Then the Village Voice declared it the best film of the year, and the rest followed like sheep at a hipster parade. Perhaps. Its sets are drawn on a single stage in chalk, and its characters are treated like nothing more than the variously-coloured pieces of chalk in the puppet-master Von Trier's hands. Nicole Kidman, as Grace, a new stranger in the town of Dogville, attempts to vie for the town's good graces, but quickly becomes misunderstood, mistreated, and abused as the stakes rise with the implications of hiding a wanted criminal. It's been treated as obvious anti-American whitewash, but what strikes me about *Dogville* is how convincing a testimony it is of the direct relationships between progress, isolation, violence, moral transgression, and illusions. Plus Von Trier is the first director to truly understand the dangers of emotional attachment to a character, to the degree that he frames the very ending of the story around this idea.



### 5 *Hero* (Zhang Yimou)

Admit it, you loved this film. I mean, honestly, how could I not include this on the list; it's one of the most ambitious and elaborate films I've seen in my life. But this isn't just a pretty martial arts film: it's a drama of revenge, betrayal, and other emotions, externalized in beautifully symbolic colour. It's a film which says more about psychology and character through strikingly meditative fight scenes than it ever could with realms of dialogue. It's a story about the art of storytelling itself: a self-reflexive spin on weaving tales for higher aims, as the soldier/narrator gets closer and closer, both literally and

symbolically, to the king's throne. Even by the end, it becomes difficult to discern what is part of the story within the story, and what may have 'really' taken place. Also, the political subtext is decidedly ambivalent: you can either read the film as an apologetic for imperialist kingdoms, or a grim denouncement of them.

### 4 *Before Sunset* (Richard Linklater)

I could say a lot about Richard Linklater's film: about how *finally* we see honest, real and intelligent people work out ordinary emotions; how the sequel bridges the gap of 9 years between the original *Before Sunrise*; how *Slacker* defined completely all the issues of my generation, and every Linklater film since has attempted to work out solutions to them; how you can feel the intimacy between Linklater, Ethan

Hawke, and Julie Delpy; how the film serves as a love letter to Paris – but really, this film is great because it's an entirely convincing love story. Unfolding in real time, there's never any emotional leaps of faith required on the part of the viewer – these are characters you actually *want* to spend 100 minutes with; what a novel idea.

### 3 *The Five Obstructions* (Lars Von Trier and Jorgen Leth)

If you didn't already think Lars Von Trier is an asshole, here's your proof: The enfant terrible himself (and I apologize to all haters that I had to include two of his films on this list) sits down with fellow

Danish filmmaker Jorgen Leth, Von Trier's confessed mentor, and makes him remake his experimental-doc-hybrid *The Perfect Human* five times, each with several, often absurd, restrictions. While I'm not a big fan of Leth's work, what's most immediately fascinating is how each film is better than the preceding one, even outdoing the original. Just try not to be impressed when Leth re-shoots a bourgeois dinner scene in the middle of the street in the impoverished Red Light district in Bombay, or when he has to make a cartoon, so he tracks down Bob Sabiston (animation director on *Waking Life*). Or how about when Von Trier decides he's not satisfied, and forces Leth to remake the film with *no* restrictions as 'punishment'. *The Obstructions* is full of so much meta-cinema, it's completely unprecedented.

hard to know where to start. A meditation on creativity, artistic 'credit', the therapeutic power of art, and quite possibly some mystical release which comes from relinquishing control, and conceding to imperfections; but perhaps more than anything an apology for Von Trier's work. Now we know where that crazy, drunken, half-sarcastic, completely ironic 'Dogme '95' manifesto came from: the ceaseless conviction that art is about limitations. Whether or not you agree with Von Trier, you have to admit, it's a convincing argument.

### 2 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry)

In the crisis of the post-modern moment, some theorists and philosophers gathered together in a dark room and thought up ways to counter Baudillard, Susan Sontag, and all the rest. The thinking was that if reality had really dissolved into representation and vice-versa, then there was no longer anything concrete to refer to; all art could consist of now was empty signifiers. Then someone realized that in order for any artwork to be recog-

nizable, it had to have, for the viewer, previously-defined connotations based on perceptual experience. Memory was in fact the missing link, and the common ground from which all expression stems. What's so interesting about *Eternal Sunshine*



is that it is not only about the power of this discovery, but about the very crisis of representation itself; and the degree to which screenwriter Charlie Kaufmann and director Gondry handle it with passion and urgency is what drives it to new heights of artful and intelligent filmmaking. As nostalgic as it is philosophically rich, *Eternal Sunshine* avoids all the pitfalls that usually plague these kinds of films: lack of emotional intensity, over-complicated premises, and narrative stagnation. Instead, this film just gets better and better, as Jim Carrey's character runs around through his head, the momentum increased by spectacularly cathartic visuals.

### 1 *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring* (Kim Ki-Duk)

Korean director Kim Ki-Duk's profound Buddhist fable strikes me as not only the most beautiful and elegant film I've seen this year, but also the most important. Minimal but lyrical, *Spring...* tells its story so well it's easy to forget that there's very little dialogue (I've heard that his newest film eschews dialogue altogether). Following a young boy who grows up on a tiny floating temple, the film separates the seasons – which serve as chapters for the film – into stages of life, but also into degrees of a cycle, as the aging priest imparts his wisdom to the boy. The priest's treatment of the rebellious and sometimes violent boy involves a lot of brutal and ironic punishment, and there's no doubt that this is a very authentically Buddhist story, right down to the fact that the film is stripped down to bare simplicity. The film is also the strongest case of representing nature I've ever seen in cinema – the images of the small creatures which the boy cruelly tortures by tying rocks around their necks, is one that still haunts me. More generally speaking, *Spring...* is the best argument I can imagine for a purely cinematic language; its power of communicating complex ideas in the most simplest and natural imagery feels completely unprecedented.



## The Aviator Soars

DiCaprio flies higher than any other performance this year, observes Jared Bryer

In a year saturated with biopics, it's hard to decide which ones are worth seeing and which should fall by the wayside. Oftentimes a film about the life of a famous person follows a very standard rise-and-fall pattern that can make such movies take on cookie-cutter uniformity. While it may not be a perfect film, Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* has it where it counts, with a stellar cast and unique storytelling.

The film explores part of the life of Aviation mogul, filmmaker and millionaire Howard Hughes, a man deeply troubled by his own obsessive behavior. While certain aspects of Hughes' life are ignored in the film, Scorsese's focus on his early filmmaking and career as an Aviator gives the picture the depth of story and character it requires without getting involved with too many needless side plots.

In terms of the acting, the film is far above anything else I've seen this year. Leonardo DiCaprio is incredible (not something I ever thought I'd say after seeing *Titanic*), precisely capturing Hughes' personality and mannerisms. While Hughes



isn't immediately a likeable character, DiCaprio is able to simultaneously show his power and his frailty in a single moment. In one scene we see Hughes at the top of the world, dining with the rich and famous. However, in the blink of an eye he is completely unnerved by something as slight as a friend touching his dinner. In another scene, Hughes is shown obsessively washing his hands to the point of drawing blood, when he thinks he has been contaminated. The absence of paper towels in the washroom leaves him trapped, unable to do something as simple as open a door, for fear of the germs on the handle. However, the film isn't merely a showcase for DiCaprio. Cate Blanchett delivers an excellent portrayal of Katherine Hepburn and Jude Law is a great Errol Flynn, although only for about five minutes of screen time.

While the film has its highlights there are a few flaws that detract slightly from the overall experience. The film is quite long and the plot seems to sag a bit in the middle. A bit of narrative tightening wouldn't have hurt in this instance. Also - and it is a small complaint - there is a great deal made during the early portion of the film about Hughes' desire to film authentic aerial photography for his multi-million dollar epic, *Hells Angels*. However, in the actual film instead of putting into practice what Hughes himself wanted to accomplish, Scorsese relies on CGI sequences that, while allowing for some great angles, look out of place.

Unlike most biopics, *The Aviator* follows Hughes' rise and fall, but also his second rise. Scorsese wisely chooses to omit the later part of Hughes' life, when he degenerated into drug addiction and madness. This makes for a much better story, and a haunting conclusion where the audience knows that Hughes' victory will be short lived. *The Aviator* is a fantastic film that really soars above and beyond the usual biographical fair.

## Closer to Distance

Joel Elliott argues that Mike Nichols' latest, *Closer*, falls short in characterization

The newest film from veteran director Mike Nichols (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *The Graduate*, *Carnal Knowledge*), a cornucopia of deviant romantic exchanges between two couples, couldn't bear a more misleading title. Such narcissistic conduct doesn't reflect intimacy in the least, but obsession, infatuation and irrationality. I enjoy misanthropic treatment of way-too-prolific actors like Julia Roberts and Jude Law as much as the next jaded film student, but *Closer* is full of such tongue-in-cheek cynicism that its many heterosexual romantic permutations become overwrought and homogenized.

The film follows Dan (Law), a London native, who meets an emigre from New York, the young and whimsical Alice (Natalie Portman). The two fall in love, evidently at the cost of Dan's previous relationship, and move in together. Dan, however, soon meets an American photographer, Anna (Julia Roberts), whom he falls for. On a whim, Dan joins some seedy English internet sex chat, pretending to be a young woman named 'Anna', and convinces the young doctor Larry (Clive Owen) on the other end, to meet her the next day. When Larry meets the real Anna, she realizes the set-up, but of course her and Larry develop a romantic relationship anyway, because, well hell, he's a doctor. If you can make it through the agonizingly long low-brow exchanges which lead up to this point, things start to become complicated. After months of Larry and Anna's relationship, which leads to an eventual marriage, it is evident that Anna and Dan still have something between them.

The storyline reads like the synopsis of an entire season of *Days of our Lives*, and the treatment is only slightly better. Natalie Portman gives perhaps the most redeeming role, although the companions to Maria Schneider in *Last Tango in Paris* are laughable. The film has an elliptical structure which seems to heighten Nichols' obvious polemic against romanticized relationships, and so the emphasis on the characters' illogical and devastatingly self-destructive romantic tendencies becomes consistently overstated. By stretching the plot over episodes which take place over several years, the dramatic arc is actually a rapid zig-zag. It gets to the point that every scene seems to introduce a new conflict, and eventually results in a climax and separation between two lovers.

Nichols obviously has talent and some insightful scenes and occasionally poignant dialogue ("You know what a heart looks like? It looks like a bleeding fist." is a great line), but if *Closer* were a sociology essay (maybe it's supposed to be), he would fall for redundancy. Apparently screenwriter (and author of the original play, which I haven't seen but would probably be much better suited for the material) Patrick Marber was doing lots of copy-and-pasting, because the same lines - "Thank you for being honest", "Did you cum?", "I'm leaving you", etc. - seem to come up way too much. It doesn't help either that the conversations - which comprise the entire action of the film - tend to start out rather clever and end in shallow dramatic exchanges; it ends up coming off less as insightful, and more as a kind of adolescent fantasy about what sexual promiscuity is like.

Worse still is that for a film so blatantly character-driven, and whose strongest aspect is its insight into how character flaws can be as much the object of obsession as can strengths, there doesn't seem to be much differentiation between characters at all. Jude Law is evidently the romantic British charmer, while Clive Owens is the blunt, nice-guys-finish-last persona, but in the end you can't help intensely hating all of them equally.

## : Getting Closer to the one of the year's more intense films : : Rachel Farquharson unravels a sordid tale :

Fancy a sexually steamy, emotionally loaded film? Meet Alice (Natalie Portman), Daniel (Jude Law), Anna (Julia Roberts), and Larry (Clive Owen). These four intermingling individuals are *Closer*'s main attractions, featuring in a whirlwind of adulterous acts and melodramatic behaviour. Alice and Daniel meet on the way to the hospital, shortly after a car has sucked the former. It is revealed that Alice is something of a quirky stripper with a pure yet childish heart, while Daniel is content with being a lamenting, overly emotional sod who falls in love with...well, really any beautiful woman upon sight. Enter Anna, played by none other than pretty-woman

Julia Roberts. She is to be the thorn in Alice's side when, after a year of faithfulness, Daniel decides that he is in love with Anna. When his love is met with resistance, good ole' Dan decides to take his frustration out the best way he knows how: chat room cyber-sex. While pretending to be a mix by the name of Anna, Daniel meets Larry, a frustrated and bored doctor, looking for some kicks himself. In a strange twist of events, Larry ends up meeting the real Anna and so we have our couple number two. As an aside, time in this movie unfolds unlike any other movie I have seen. With a scene change, a year has gone by, and the only reason I was aware of this elapsed time was by dialogue clues from the characters. The effect is quite artistic actually. The movie develops as Daniel has an affair with Anna, which breaks up Anna and Larry's marriage. Alice returns to stripping, where she and Larry engage in a few no-no's themselves. The film culminates with Alice returning home to America, Anna and Larry remaining married, and the poor dolt of a man Daniel...well he gets blown up in his car by accident. Just kidding, he just ends up alone...but after being left by two hotties, I should think that he would rather be blown up. I was doing him a favour really.

Although I received mixed opinions before and after seeing *Closer*, I rather enjoyed it. It did, however, leave me toying with the idea that maybe relationships aren't something to aspire to after all. The four main characters live in a world in which tact doesn't exist. They just say what they want without any thought of the consequences. Bizarre? Nope, it sounds just like my little brother. But this aspect of the film is probably the most truthful. Is it not human nature to want to know how the act of betrayal was committed, and when, where and how good it was? The scenes in which confessions were made were well acted and projected the angst, pain and panic that must be felt when one is being cheated on. Portman gave a poignant performance as Alice, whose character reminded me of Miss Holly Golightly of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*: a woman who doesn't want to be owned by anyone. Law, who for some reason has been named the sexiest man of the year, transformed Daniel into a pathetic, whining wanker. To be truthful, he was really playing himself in this movie, wasn't he? Roberts wasn't as commanding as she has been in the past, which might be because of the energy and attention that the bun in her oven was taking from her. Owens...well he managed to play a good man, conniving a-hole, and a horny, cyber-sex fiend all in one movie, so kudos!!





## Hotel Rwanda: Human Drama at its Best

Jared Bryer reviews the story of one man standing up in the face of genocide

Films based on true stories are in no short supply nowadays. Most recent to be released is director Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda*, a film about a single man standing up against a group of militant radicals bent on genocide. While there are a lot of movies based on the lives of actual people floating around at the box office right now (some much better than others), this film is head and shoulders above most anything you'll see in theaters, offering a startling portrait of courage, human depravity, and global ambivalence.

Don Cheadle plays Paul Rusesabagina, operator of The Milles Collines hotel. When a violent ethnic militia rises up to "cleanse" the country of anyone of opposing ancestry, Paul finds himself the unlikely provider of shelter for waves of refugees. This is the part Don Cheadle has been waiting for. Finally he proves his acting potential by breaking out of the cycle of smug caper movies he's been doing for the past few years. Cheadle perfectly captures the emotional intensity of the character, generating many tense moments.

The supporting cast is also especially good. Nick Nolte plays a United Nations officer, modeled after Canadian Romeo Dallaire, who tries to support the refugees while his leaders abandon the country to its fate. It was nice to see Nolte in a good part

again, and with a normal looking haircut. He is a much better actor than the recent parts he's been given (i.e. Hulk) and he deserves good scripts, arrest or no arrest. Sophie Okonedo delivers a solid performance as Paul's wife, and even Joaquin Phoenix appears as a video journalist trying to bring images of the genocide to the world.

On the negative side, there were moments when the film skirted on the edge of melodrama. However, George's steady direction and a tight script prevent this from happening, grounding the material and hammering the film's message home without feeling ham-handed.

Ultimately, the film is an excellent example of what a biopic should be. Rusesabagina is credited for his heroism, without the film ever trying to make him look like anything more than an average man who did the right thing. Also, several shots, including the image of thousands of bodies littering a road shrouded in fog, prove how effective good filmmaking can be in simultaneously conveying emotion and fact. *Hotel Rwanda* is a powerful film that should be seen by anyone with the slightest interest in history, true stories, or human drama; one of the year's best.



## Sailing in Uneasy Waters

Daniel B. Field says *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* Stays Afloat...But Just Barely

Watching director Wes Anderson's newest film *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, I can't help but think that I've seen this before. Not necessarily the story, but the style and deadpan tone that was so prevalent in Anderson's *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Both featured a rather unlikeable protagonist as well as a quirky cast of one-note supporting characters, each with a foible of their own. While this worked exceedingly well for *Rushmore*, when its appearance was wholly refreshing after the over-saturation of really bad teen movies or Godzilla remakes, six years later *Life Aquatic* feels stale and redundant.

The film itself is intriguing, with Bill Murray as the title's namesake, as well as a supporting cast that includes Owen Wilson, Jeff Goldblum, Willem Dafoe, and Cate Blanchett. Their performances were impressive, although generally unsurprising. Anderson trades the hyper-realistic and minutely detailed sets and narration in *Tenenbaums* for the Brechtian dollhouse construction of the ship and surreal CGI sea creatures. The ship resembles a child's toy, with each of the Team Zissou members walking around as if they were Anderson's figurines. Complete with pirates and a plot to kill the legendary Jaguar Shark, the film is little more than an exploration of a child's imagination. Unfortunately, *The Life Aquatic* is not a children's movie.

The miniature adventures and plot turns seem forced; ultimately, a film that would have been more effective as a humorous character study on Zissou became an utterly bizarre seafaring caper. The episodic nature of the film leaves gaps in the middle that are entirely too slow and aimless.

Anderson's attention to details has become one of his trademarks, and at times it is one of his strengths. His soundtrack is among the best of the year, with Mark Mothersbaugh's light and poppy score mixed with singer and film co-star Seu Jorge singing early David Bowie songs in Portuguese. Like his



earlier films, Anderson's soundtrack fits perfectly with his film. Wes Anderson is at risk of getting stale as a filmmaker. Like Woody Allen, whose output is so similar that at times films blend into one another, Anderson needs to expand his style beyond the deadpan comedy. However, he is slowly becoming more important in the reinvigoration of Hollywood, and is already beginning to see directors follow in his footsteps, most notably with Jared Hess' *Napoleon Dynamite*. This is the last time that Anderson can get away with making the same film over again before his work becomes a thing of the past. Nevertheless, *The Life Aquatic* is enjoyable if uneven, and likely more pleasant for those who are not yet bored of the Anderson aesthetic.

## Boxing Clever Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* carries potent meditations, writes Siqi Zhu

Despite the title being evocative of the kind of harmless jests that flood the theatres around Christmas, *Million Dollar Baby* is, much like Eastwood's last film *Mystic River*, melancholy and darkly contemplative, yet without the latter's obsessively self-important drive to dissect the human psyche. What results is a rare emotional candor that helps to lift *Million Dollar Baby* above that ever-so-banal genre of boxing movies.

Eastwood himself stars as Frankie, a reclusive boxing trainer/manager, who runs a down-trodden L.A. gym with long time pal Scrap (Morgan Freeman). Disturbance comes to this machismo-R-Us when Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank), a 31-year-old waitress, turns up at the door



trying to give a last shot at life through professional boxing. Against his better sense, as some argue, Frankie begins training Maggie, who soon begins to show great promise until...well, life decides to give them a reality check.

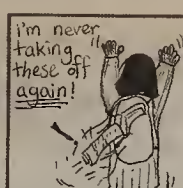
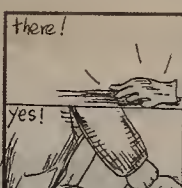
The mundane although sensible plot is the usual outsider-turned-good story, with a big plot twist that unfortunately should fail to impress any serious cinephile. But an insipid storyline is not always such a bad thing, especially when so much of the movie's emotional punch is packed into its restrained and understated performance. To their due credit, Hillary and Clint are both brilliant in their respective roles, precisely capturing the succession of emotions created by life's many trials and tribulations—concealed compassion, buoyancy, and eventually, resignation. Their performance also provides a compelling examination of bereavement, with both Frankie and Maggie being in the peculiar situation where both of their families have chosen to abandon them; the father-daughter dynamic that ensues is genuinely moving and helps to sustain interest.

Also at work is Clint's characteristic directorial style—the slow pace, stark lighting and shadows, and what are by modern standards painstakingly long shots, all of which convey a certain unrelenting and philosophical undertone. It would have been perfect had it not been for Morgan Freeman, whose ever-so-superfluous narration oozes insincerity and dumbs the movie down quite a bit.

But then again, to ask for more than what *Million Dollar Baby* offers—truthfulness and honesty—is probably too much. Clint Eastwood deserves a pat on the back, not only for his rejection of the sort of emotional manipulativeness that thrust the likes of Michael Moore to cinematic prominence, but for making a solid drama that carries potent observations and meditations.

The Adventures of cyborg Power Tool Monkey on Fire n' Friends

by Jared Michael Bryer



## Announcements

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